

2001-Hollyhock-Retreat-01-To Know Yourself as the Underlying Awareness - Hollyhock Retreat 2001- 352x256 - 1 of 5

[Speaker 1] (2:51 - 1:17:51)

I hope you use the trail to come here. It's the most wonderful walk. Unless, of course, you're physically challenged, you may have to use the road.

If possible, use the trail. Magic. It's not magic if you're stuck in your mind and the mental noise when you walk along it.

Then it's just a trail, and you're getting from A to B on it. And so let's just address on how to be with nature and in nature. Let's just stay with that trail for a while, but it could be anything or anywhere, walking by the water, standing, sitting.

And there are all these beautiful forms, life forms, around you. And it's good to be aware of that, to acknowledge that, to look, to listen. But more important even than that is to be aware of a dimension that is beyond the forms that you see.

Words are dangerous because every word that I use now is a form. The whole of language only reflects the world of form. So when you speak of something that's beyond form, you immediately reduce it to form.

This is why the beginning of the Tao Te Ching, one of the most ancient and profound books written in Chinese thousands of years ago, the Tao is the essence of being, being itself. The Tao that can be spoken of is not the true Tao. And then, of course, the book continues to speak of it.

And the same happens here. But the book begins with those lines to alert the reader to the fact that the truth isn't in the words, that the words are already a reduction. Once you know that, then you're less inclined to mistake the words for the truth.

And you're aware of the limitations of language. And that's helpful when you know that, of course, it's limited, of course, that's not quite it. And they're only pointers, little pointers.

So I am saying the same as the writer of the Tao Te Ching said three thousand years ago. Don't hang on to the words. They're not explanations.

I'm not here to explain the universe. It's far beyond what you could understand through the mind. But the essence of the universe is in you.

So you can know the essence as yourself, but not conceptually. Only when the mind becomes still. And that knowing isn't like the knowing that the mind knows.

It's a knowing that looks as if you didn't know anything anymore from the point of view of the mind. That's why the Buddhists have called that state emptiness. But I don't use that word very much because, at least in the West, it's not a helpful pointer.

Everybody would walk out empty. But of course it's an attempt to speak of that which you cannot speak of. So having said this, we go back to the forest trail.

And there you are, walking. Your senses are alert, which means you're quite present. And you're perceiving visually, seeing, listening, hearing, in a state of simple, not strained, simple, open alertness.

Which means you don't carry the burden of a heavy personal sense of me which consists really mainly of your problems. And while you walk, you don't walk with that burden on your back. And you walk simply as a field of alert presence.

Don't worry about the me and the problems. You can pick them up at any time again. But while you walk, something arises that is greater than that limited personal sense of me.

You're not losing anything. So there's an alertness, presence. And then you look at, you may look, there's a tree movement of the branches.

You could focus on anything of this. At any moment there's thousands of life-forms surrounding you. Or you can take in the totality, occasionally focus on one.

And then you go deeper. And I suggest you do that at first when you're sitting down somewhere and watching, or standing somewhere and watching and listening. You acknowledge the forms.

And then there arises a sense of some all-encompassing presence that holds all these forms together. And at first you may, it may be that you become aware of an all-pervasive stillness that is there. But it's alive.

The stillness isn't quite right word, but what else can we say? There's a stillness around, although there are certain noises, the noises of the forest. Tiny, today the sea is like, almost like a mirror, but occasionally tiny waves and ripples make a noise.

And they're surrounded always by stillness. And then there are birds occasionally flying. An enormous field of still presence, like as if it were holding everything within its embrace.

And if you become aware of that, you've already gone beyond the forms. Not by denying the forms, but you go beyond. Because the moment you become aware of that field, that awareness is the arising of presence within you.

And what really that is, you're becoming aware of the awareness through which all

perception happens directly. That sounds dualistic, becoming aware of awareness, but that's only because of language. That's because every sentence is a subject and an object.

It sounds as if you were becoming aware of something that is not you, an object in consciousness. And of course that is true as far as all sense perceptions are concerned. You are aware of something.

You see it, you touch it, you hear it. It's a sound, it's a visual thing. It's something.

You are aware of something. So that's why language reflects that. There's always a subject and an object in the sentence.

But when you become aware of awareness, the underlying field, there's no longer any duality there. What really happens is you're becoming aware of the essence of yourself. Awareness is becoming aware of itself.

Awareness knows itself. You know yourself as yourself. Not two, but one.

And it begins with a simple thing, like you contemplate a form in nature, and then become aware of the space and stillness around it. And then perhaps close your eyes for a moment, and the form that you have been looking at disappears. And there's simply, there was the disappearing form is gone, although there may still be a trace of it in your mind retained as a mental image, but that may also go.

And there's simply a sense of spacious presence. Not aware of anything in particular, just aware. So the ground of all being, beingness itself, which is not confined to the inner, there's ultimately no distinction between within and without.

Knowing the ground of all being, and knowing the forms that arise out of it, which are fine. So nature is a wonderful help, but some people get stuck when they go into nature, in the forms of nature. Even if they go beyond labeling, most nature enthusiasts, of course, go into nature because they are very knowledgeable about nature, and whatever they look at, they immediately know what it is, and they label it.

They might even go with a catalog of bird species, and then they cross off each one they see. And then others may go beyond that, and no longer label, but still not be aware of awareness. They're still with the forms, just the forms.

So the most wonderful thing is, and this is the whole, if you can get even a glimpse of it, that is the awakening of what it means simply to know yourself as the underlying awareness. Externalized, it is perceived as the underlying stillness, alive stillness around, that surrounds all phenomena. Now when you're in a city, it's hard to sense the underlying stillness that surrounds all phenomena on Times Square in New York, or on the freeway in L.A. Where's the underlying stillness that surrounds all phenomena out of

which everything arises on the freeway? Of course, it's there too. But you may not be able to sense that as an external field of stillness as you do here. It's easy to know it in the so-called external world as a field of stillness.

On Times Square in New York, you may not sense it as the external field of stillness because there's so much noise going on there, and yet it's still within you as the space of aware presence. So there may be times when you find it both within and without, like here, in this gathering and out in nature, there is a still, very alive presence that is beyond the forms. The forms exist in it.

It's in and in between. You know how inadequate words are. So the opportunity here is you can begin to sense it as if it were something external to you.

So you step out of your room in the morning, and you open the door, and then your senses are alert, and you watch, and you look, and then you become aware of the very consciousness that is looking. And for a moment then you close your eyes. The forms, at least the visual forms, have disappeared.

What's left is simply beingness, presence. And maybe a thought occasionally arises in it and subsides. And another thought may come.

And that's also a form that arises. There's physical forms, and there are thought forms, inner. They arise also in that vastness.

But you know the vastness that is both within and without. It's even vaster when you go into outer space. If you traveled there, the vastness of nature here, you would realize how much vaster that is.

The infinite space that you perceive. And there's something here that takes you to the limit of what can be understood, because you see the infinity of outer space, and it goes on and on. And there seems to be no end to it.

And then the mind says, okay, if there is an end to the universe, to space, what's beyond that? There must be more space. And if there's no end, that seems impossible, too.

It goes on, billions of light years, the vastness of that. And it's a field of just space, of spaciousness. And this is how we perceive it through the senses.

We perceive it as a nothingness. And we perceive it as infinite nothingness. And a few forms in it.

Galaxies. And every galaxy, billions of suns and systems. And they're tiny forms of luminosity.

And then there's vast emptiness. And in another world, another galaxy. And another.

And a million and ten million. And a hundred million. But so much more space than things in it.

And if you look into everything, the essence of everything is also space there. It's mostly empty space. Every physical object, the atoms, the distances, the spaces between the atoms is so vast.

But it looks solid. So it's perceived through our senses as space. It is the eternal, the infinity, the infinite itself, the eternal.

You could say that the closest you can get to perceiving God through the senses is to see God as space. The all that pervades everything from within and without. That is the essence of everything.

But that's the external. Really what that is, what is perceived, it is the field of consciousness. The one consciousness.

So after our little excursion into space, we are back here, which is also space, becoming aware of the space or spaciousness in nature that embraces the forms. A field. And at that moment the mind becomes still and you're aware of the inner space.

It is aware of itself. And once you know that, you can go anywhere, even to places where there is no silence outside, or very little, where there is little nature. And even there it's no longer a problem, because it's all within.

The stillness is there, underneath thought. We don't have the heating on, do we? Now mostly people become aware of this dimension only through great loss, suffering, great loss.

Many forms that they had identified with, whether they be thought forms, belief systems, identifications with this or that, thoughts, which are identifications with external things, loss is experienced in a person's life, and loss is a disappearing, dissolving form. Death in one way or another. As long as you are attached to forms and derive your sense of self from forms, identified with different forms, thoughts, things, images, people, and a form disappears, dies, that is painful, that is suffering.

It's also a potential opening into that which is beyond form. The very dimension that we enter here, to most people, is only accessible when they come into contact with death in one form or another. And even then, it's only a potential opening into the formless.

In many cases, in most cases, that potential is not realized. There's only suffering. But whenever life removes a form from you that you had identified with, and it could be a person, or it could be possessions, or it could be that your belief structures suddenly crumble, the mental forms, whatever it may be, life removes forms and it leaves a sense of, you don't know who you are anymore because you had identified yourself through

those forms that gave you your sense of me.

And always, at some point, life will remove the forms that you had identified with as me. So, life gives you that opportunity, and it's perceived, from the point of view of the me, as bad, as dreadful. It doesn't want to go there.

But every little me will have to go there, because the forms eventually will leave you. And the sooner it happens, in a way, the better. If you are so lucky that you live to the age of 90, and then no form has left you, your wife is still there, you've been married for 70 years, and your money is still there, and the world still thinks you're important, even, this is unlikely, but even then, at some point, it will come, your wife will die.

And the world may forget about you, that you're important. Or the world keeps telling you that you're important, and you can no longer believe in it yourself. That means that those forms leave you.

And some people are faced with a sudden loss of many forms all at once. And those were the first people who came to spiritual realization in the history of humankind. The first people who realized that which lies beyond form, were people, of course, the first, there were no spiritual teachers yet.

Those became spiritual teachers, but what first happened to them was life took almost everything away from them at once. So the forms went, and where the forms were, that they had identified with, there were just holes in their lives. Big holes.

And at first there was enormous pain, because it's death, death everywhere. And then the pain became so much that they couldn't stand it anymore. Suddenly, there was a relinquishment of resistance to the suchness of this, and there was a yes to the emptiness, the little, the holes everywhere.

And in that moment, enormous inner peace came suddenly. They had gone beyond form, beyond identification with form, which is also mind. And they had essence realization, realization of the essence of being.

No longer needing to define themselves through some form. And that's, later they look back and say, what happened there? Where's that peace?

Where did that come from? And then perhaps after a long time, they could see, oh yes, I became free, free. And then they tried to explain it to others, at first not successfully.

And then they tried to recreate that experience for others, and set up a school, a monastery. And people who came into the monastery shaved their head, and adopted a different name, and were, just threw away their old clothes, and just wear simple garments, to let go of identification with form. That makes sense.

However, the danger that immediately creeps in is that in itself becomes a new form that you identify with, because now you are, you have a new identity as the spiritual one, who has let go of all forms. And then, after hundreds of years, it becomes an established thing. And then a Buddhist monk is respected, well, not everywhere anymore in the East, but on the whole, respected.

He has status in society. In India, there's still the tradition of people at a certain stage in their life, leave everything behind. They don't even join a club.

They don't join necessarily a community or monastery. They just start wandering from place to place, leaving everything. That's great spiritual practice.

But you don't need that. You can do it. You're leaving it behind already.

It doesn't matter so much if in the external you carry on with the forms, as long as you, I'm not telling you to leave all the forms of your life behind. That's another, it is a way, but you carry the thought forms anyway, and they are not easily left behind. Continue to honor the world of form, whatever that is in your life, without getting lost, losing yourself in the forms and believing in them.

And that starts with a simple thing, like we pointed out last night. Don't take your mind too seriously. And that means also, because it's a reflection of external forms, don't take the external forms too seriously.

They do go together. When you don't take your mind too seriously, you don't take the events and the situations that arise and subside around you that seriously. Not that you don't honor them and face every challenge that presents itself in the now.

That's the only place where it can present itself. The rest is pseudo challenges, and that's called problems in the mind. True challenge is now, and you face that, not that you turn away and say, I'm done with form.

I don't want to know anything anymore. You could do. That's happened.

Some people have done it in India and turned away from all forms and went to a cave. And they were lucky they were in India, and people came and put food in their mouth. If you do it in the West, they will put you away.

So don't do it. You don't need to turn to reject forms and say, it's all unreal. Ultimately, it may be true, but I wouldn't even say it like that.

You don't reject the forms that constitute your life situation, and they may be good. They may be half-half. They may be bad.

You may be at a low cycle of your form identity, or you may be at a high cycle of your form identity. It doesn't really matter. If you're at a high cycle of your form identity, and

you're nevertheless here, that means you have somehow already looked through that as not ultimately it, not ultimately you, not ultimately the truth.

And that's enormous to do that when people who the world is there at the peak, and yet they come. It's always a miracle. When you're at a low, it's easier.

It's easier to be drawn here. Forms become very unsatisfactory, and a low could mean that you have just experienced death in one way or another. Forms have left you.

Your form identity beginning to crumble. It's not working out. It shouldn't have happened.

It wasn't part of the story that was going to be my life. Now everybody, no matter whether you are at the peak of form, even if you're at the peak, of course, you will experience the other. That's the polarity of the world of form.

So it's a liberation from that, and it begins with what we called last night, don't take your thoughts too seriously, because thought is form, beginning of form. And when you don't take your thoughts too seriously, and that of course implies, I wouldn't say to anybody, because still a majority of humans are so identified with their thought that the statement don't take your thoughts too seriously would be meaningless. And the thought would immediately react to that statement.

What are you talking about? Because not being able to, anybody who can listen to this and can endure sitting here, not just for two hours, but a whole weekend, means there is space within you already. From there you can listen.

Otherwise, if you were totally identified with thought, you would either fall asleep, thought would switch off, or you would become so anxious, restless, you couldn't stand it anymore, or you would become reactive. Thought would react, it would feel threatened. Your very thought-based identity would feel threatened by every word.

And then you would shout something and run out. In a final attempt to be right, which is the ego's great thing, and before anybody can challenge you, you run out. It has happened.

So, not taking your mind too seriously, and then that leads to, inevitably, not taking your life situation too seriously. Handle it well, and you will, because there's presence. When you're not in your mind, you will handle, you do handle, situations that arise with care.

You give it attention. So it is, you take care of the now, and whatever arises in it, because your attention is there. It's not somewhere else where you want to be.

So you are truly responsible for this. You take responsibility for life, which is now, which means you have the ability to respond to the now fully. And yet, despite the fact that

there is care, you don't take it that seriously, because you don't take your mind that seriously, which means it does not have the heaviness to it that otherwise it has, when all you know is the forms with which you identify as me, then they are very serious, and every event that happens and challenges, even in the slightest, your idea of how things should be, will lead to reactivity, anxiety, anger, fear. There's no space anymore, and you can always sense in a person the loss of inner spaciousness or presence, stillness, when they are being challenged, and that can happen through a challenge, and you get drawn back into, suddenly, this, it matters, it matters.

And it could be a tiny thing or a big thing, it's the same reaction. And that's to be lost, to be lost, what in India they would say, lost in illusion, lost in form, lost in an illusory sense of self, because every form, you need the form to give you your sense of self. In other words, you don't know who you are.

Beginning of suffering. You don't know yourself. Not that you could ever know yourself in the sense that the mind knows an object in awareness, you can't know yourself in that way.

And there are people who are seeking self-realization for 20, 30, and 40 years, believing that they could know themselves in the same way that they know an object in the external world. They believe, and they're looking for self-realization, thinking, at some point, I will know who I am, but they're looking for it on the level of objects in consciousness. I will have a complete knowledge of me.

That means, who is having that knowledge? You forgot the one, the I that has the knowledge, and you say, now I know myself, there it is. So you make yourself into an object in consciousness, and know a lot about yourself.

That's all you can ever do when you make yourself into an object. You can know vast amounts about yourself, and it will be very complex. Because the longer you study the self, the more complex it gets.

And there are layers and layers of things. Not that, again, that may have its place for a while. But you can't know yourself in that way.

You cannot become an object to yourself, an object in awareness. That's the ego. That is the sense of the little me.

The egoic sense of self is the very thing you have made yourself into a mental object, and you have a relationship with that mental object. It's me, and you have a dialogue. It talks to itself.

And this is the amazing thing, to have a relationship with yourself. Who is the self, and who is the one who is having the relationship? And every relationship you have with yourself is problematic.

It's always a problematic relationship with yourself. It can't not be problematic, because you have made yourself into an object in consciousness. You don't know yourself as consciousness.

You think you're something that arises in consciousness, which is a form, a mind form, an image, consisting of many factors, but a mental image. And there we have the essence of self-delusion, of not knowing yourself. And it's called egoic sense of self, me.

And so some people who look for enlightenment, look on that level, as if they could find themselves there, as if they could become an object of knowledge, of consciousness. And you can't. And that's why those who reach that realization, reach that realization when their search on that level becomes totally frustrated.

That's another way. Either all the forms leave you, or you've been seeking and seeking, spiritually perhaps, for a long time. And finally you say, I give up.

Thirty years I've been meditating, and I've seen all the teachers. What's the point? And you come to the end of seeking, which is the end of future.

And then you sit under a tree, and suddenly you're not looking for some new form to add to you. For the first time in 30 years, after 30 years of spiritual practice, which without knowing it, actually was an attempt to add something to me. Another form, and it was called perhaps enlightenment.

I want to add the ultimate jewel into what I already have. The crowning achievement of my, what's it called in America, CV, curriculum vitae, my resume. And you sit under a tree, and no longer try to add anything.

And suddenly, here it is. Future collapses. Future as a need collapses.

You don't need to add any new form to me anymore. You're done with all that. And there you are, you sit under a tree, as the Buddha did when he gave up his search, and little petals fall on you.

And then the devas or celestial beings or angels come and say, please teach us stillness. We are still already, but not as still as you. This is the easiest way to realization.

The weekend here, you're done already with the difficult bit that's taken you here. And this is the enjoyable part. And this is the spiritual, the power of a spiritual teaching.

It removes the need for further suffering. You've recognized the ephemeral nature of all forms, and that it's not who you are. A voluntary death.

And then you can play in the world of form quite beautifully. It's not that serious. And you can be a wonderful player in the world of form, and engage in this or that activity, not looking for yourself in it.

If it works out, fine. If it doesn't work out, as it sometimes happens, fine. You don't need it to confirm to yourself that you are somebody or who you are.

You're playing now with form. And you are connected with a deeper, the deepest core, the deepest essence of who you are. And there's also beyond the fact that you play with forms and don't take them that seriously, something emanates from within you, even into the world of form.

And although it's not serious, there is a transformation that happens, even as far as your life situation, which is the world of form, is concerned. Even there, although it doesn't matter that much, even there, things become transformed. And although you cannot go beyond the polarities that govern the physical universe completely, in the world of form, you cannot go beyond up and down.

The tension between opposites upholds the entire universe. So your body is a form, your thoughts are forms, there's the world of polarity in which you move. Of course, your life will continue to have ups and downs, but it doesn't matter that much anymore, because you've gone beyond that within yourself.

But you experience the world of polarity now in a much more harmonious, benevolent way than before. When you're totally attached to forms, the world of polarity is very threatening. And it can be very extreme.

The more you're attached to form, the more extreme way you experience the polarities of the world. Heaven and hell, incredible drama. One day you go, I found the one who's going to make me happy.

I'm ecstatic. And then a few weeks later, you're, or worse, and you might be, is human unconsciousness playing itself out in one way or another. And that happens in your personal life.

Or it could be the other way. Somebody did something to me. He, she did that to me.

He did it, she did it. So instead of making identity for yourself out of unconsciousness, you put an identity onto somebody else. That's, so you get trapped in labels, definitions, and judgments, believing that there's somebody there who did it.

So both cases, it's identity, you're identified with form, and you make an identity out of human unconsciousness and say, it's me. And that's what the ego likes. The ego loves guilt.

It attaches itself to guilt because the strongest ego, some of the strongest egos are very guilty egos. Other aspect of very strong ego is resentment egos, which is the other way. Somebody out there, again, you give someone an identity.

And so that, that goes and then as this new dimension, you become a blessing. As you play in the world of form, there's something emanates from within you that teaches peace. Probably not the words, so simply the way you respond, the way you do things, the way you very often are free of reactive, free of reactivity, a teacher of peace.

You bring peace, not peace that puts you to sleep, alive, vibrantly alive peace. Not the peace that you get after two glasses of whiskey. You're going towards sleep there.

Vibrantly alive peace. Here we are, this moment in the world of form, this weekend, beautiful forms around you, and then it leaves you. And then it's gone.

No experience lasts that long. That's characteristic of form. If all you had here was the external experience, you would say, oh, what a pity.

It's gone already. But the essence of our gathering here and of this weekend is not to collect another experience. There's a timeless essence in this experience, to know the timeless essence within every experience, consciousness itself.

So use nature, pay attention to the forms, and then pay attention to the field of stillness surrounding the forms that is within and without. After a while you may find you feel that sense of still spaciousness that surrounds the form more strongly than the forms. And that's why some people in India, some teachers say the world is unreal, which I don't say, but because they sense, they know that which is beyond form so strongly, so intensely, that the world of form seems to them a play of shadows.

And so they say it's unreal. But I wouldn't say it's unreal. It is a level of relative reality, temporary forms.

If questions arise in the mind, we may look at them later, today or tomorrow, if they are still there. Some questions arise and then become irrelevant and disappear. Other questions may arise in the mind and suddenly the answer is also there because you became still after the question.

And a few questions may still be left by this afternoon or tomorrow, maybe. It doesn't matter that much. No question and answer can matter that much.

But why not look at it? Stay in connection with the body. And then that sense of inner body becomes the underlying field.

You listen with your entire body. Is that noise, can we switch that off? Is it humming noise?

No? Okay. We have something to surrender to.

There's silence, almost complete silence in the external. You listen to that bird, but not just to the sound, the space in which it happens. That's consciousness.

And now approaches within the field of consciousness, a manifestation of the human mind as an aeroplane. And that's fine, too, without losing the sense of aware presence in which that sound also happens. Now the silence is lost on the external level, but is still there on the inner level.

If it's accepted completely, the form that arises. And it's no different from a whole civilization, a noisy civilization has arisen and passed away, represented by the noise of an aeroplane in the vastness. Now to listen, so to speak, to the space underneath and between the birdsong requires vigilance and alertness.

It requires an alertness of the entire body, every cell, alert, alive, attentive. And a strange thing that arises as you enter that dimension becomes a love for whatever form arises in this field. When you are the knower of the field, which is not different from it, a love arises for whatever form is born, whether it's the bird or the aeroplane.

You love what is because it came out of you. It is you. So you know yourself.

In other life forms, you recognize your own essence there. That's love. And that's the greatest gift that you as a temporary form could give to the universe.

Of course, you are not giving it as not a mean. You become an opening for that. The love flows into this world of form.

One could almost say you redeem the world of form from its state of ignorance, which is to be trapped and identified with form. You redeem the world of form without deriving a new sense of identity out of that. Then you no longer redeem it.

You're back in form, knowing all the while that I am not doing it and yet it is the essence of who I am. So with that humility comes also great power. There's great the power of consciousness itself, the divine, the one, and great humility, knowing you're only a window, so to speak.

This form is a window. No window is important. The light that comes through is important.

Never worship a window. Just sit in the stillness for just a few minutes when I'm gone. You don't need any music.

No, just stay with it. Stillness. And then of course the stillness walks out of this room as you walk out of this room with you.